**United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service** 

# **National Organic Program**



## Exploring the Organic Option

### Meet the standards and get certified

In order to sell your agricultural product in the United States as organic, it must be grown, handled/processed, and labeled in accordance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Organic Program (NOP) standards.

If you produce more than \$5,000 worth of organic products each year, your operation must also be certified by a USDA-accredited organic certifying agent. The NOP standards (7 CFR 205) and the list of certifying agents may be accessed on the NOP website at: <a href="https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop">www.ams.usda.gov/nop</a>. Fact sheets giving background information on the NOP, as well as information on certification standards, production and handling standards, and labeling standards may also be found by clicking on <a href="mailto:Reading Room">Reading Room</a> on the NOP website.

The NOP has accredited certifying agents all over the world. A certifying agent may certify anywhere it has the means to do so. In other words if your farm is located in lowa, you may have a certifying agent from California certify your farm, if that's what you want to do.

By regulation, the fees certifying agents charge must be "reasonable." They must provide each applicant for certification with an estimate of the total cost of certification and an estimate of the annual cost of updating the certification. The cost of certification is influenced by many factors, including size and type of operation.

## Get help with organic certification

The NOP also manages two Cost Share programs that help defray certification costs. The Cost Share funds are given to the states to reimburse eligible organic producers and handlers in their states. The reimbursement cap is set at 75 percent of certification costs, not to exceed \$750. You may find the Cost Share contact for your state on the NOP website by clicking on **Organic Cost Share**.

- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program: The AMA program is funded annually and has \$1.5 million available for organic producers in the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.
- National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program: \$22 million is available until expended for both organic producers and handlers in all states, U.S. territories, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

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#### Get help with organic transition

The 2008 Farm Bill Conservation Programs may provide assistance to organic farmers and those farmers transitioning to organic production.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), under the *Organic Transition Support* provision of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) makes conservation practices related to organic production and transition to organic production eligible for payments, subject to a \$20,000 annual limit and an \$80,000 cap over a 6-year period. The details of this program are still being worked out.

The Farm Service Agency administers the Organic Transition Incentives for Beginning Farmers provision of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This provision, when fully implemented, will provide special treatment of CRP land transitioning from retiring farmers or ranchers to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

You can get more information on these topics and other NRCS assistance to organic farmers on the NRCS website at: <a href="http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html">http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html</a>.

### Get information on the basics of organic farming

The National Sustainable Agricultural Information Service produces newsletters, workbooks, fact sheets and other publications on organic farming. They specialize in educating and informing the small farmer. You may access their website at: http://www.attra.org/.

Another resource for aspiring or beginning organic farmers is the nearest Cooperative Extension System Office. The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide, non-credit educational network. Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its landgrant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by one or more experts who provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.

The USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) is the federal partner in the Cooperative Extension System. It provides federal funding to the system and, through program leadership, helps the system identify and address current issues and problems. To find out more about the Cooperative Extension System and to find your nearest Cooperative Extension Office, visit the CSREES website at: http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/.

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